

AID & TRADE

The Dutch government actively pursues the combination of aid and trade to look for mutual benefits for developing countries and business sector. This way our country plays a leading role in involving the business sector as a partner for development cooperation. Investments Dutch companies can reach successes abroad and at the same time contribute to realising the Sustainable Development Goals.

PUM is an organisation striving for a connection between aid and trade. We are focused on opportunities for Dutch businesses within our activities and to strengthen their economic ties with our clients and partners. To do this, we can use our contacts and networks within the business sector, both in the Netherlands and the countries we are active.

LEES MEER

INCOME 2018
EXPENSES 2018
EXPLANATION

GAP IN THE LEBANESE MARKET: DOMESTICALLY PRODUCED GOAT CHEESE

Goat cheese is widely consumed in Lebanon. The cheese originates from France and Spain and is rather expensive. Hajjar Foods S.A.L. identified a market opportunity and decided to venture and start producing this cheese locally. However, the dairy company lacked the technical knowhow and the recipes for producing good-quality goat cheese. That knowledge was provided by the PUM dairy expert Aart van Boven when he visited the factory last October to assist them to develop such a product. Andre Hajjar of Hajjar Foods hopes to be able to purchase the cheese-making equipment in the Netherlands. In that way, PUM will help improve food supply in emerging countries, while at the same time supporting aid and trade.



Aart van Boven and Andre Hajjar, cofounder of Hajjar Foods S.A.L., met for the second time in an Amsterdam hotel at the end of November. Hajjar visited the Netherlands for a few days to investigate possibilities to purchase machines and equipment for the production of the goat cheese. A goat cheese that Aart van Boven (66) helped to develop, in October when he visited the Hajjar Foods factory in Kab-Elias, a town in the Bekaa Valley in Eastern Lebanon.

For the preparation of Andre Hajjar's visit, Andre van Boven made a list of suppliers of cheese-making equipment. Using the list, the Lebanese businessman will be able to visit a number of Dutch companies. As he explained, he is above all interested in second-hand machines. "Hajjar Foods is currently in the start-up phase. We are not yet in a position to invest a great deal of money." If purchase is successful, it will be a positive spin-off from the assistance provided by the PUM expert. Hajjar Foods intends also the purchase of cultures (natural bacteria that are responsible for the flavour formation in cheese, yoghurt and quark) and other ingredients needed to give the goat cheese its special flavour from the suppliers suggested by Aart.

PURE AND AUTHENTIC

Hajjar Foods is a family business established in 2015 by father Sami Hajjar (Food Engineer with 35 years of international experience in the food industry), son Andre (34), electrical engineer with knowledge of business development and sales, and sister Joëlle (25) with a master's degree in food technology. Joëlle Hajjar is responsible for the day-to-day management of the dairy factory which employs around ten people. Under the brand name Go Baladi, Hajjar Foods produces (among other items) organic Labneh (a very thick yoghurt) and Halloumi (a sort of cheese made from goat milk). Another addition to the product portfolio will be fresh and matured goat cheese.

Andre Hajjar continued: "Products made from goat milk are clearly becoming a trend in Lebanon and throughout the region. At present, people purchase especially goat cheese from the big French brands, although they are not really fresh and are expensive too. While prices are around two euros for 150 g in France, in the Lebanon it will cost between 4 and 5 euros. We have of course no chance of outperforming the big brands, but we can produce it more cheaply and fresh. The circumstance that our cheese is a Lebanese, organic product made with milk from goats that graze on herbs growing in the in the Lebanese Mountains is our big selling point. Our brand Go Baladi (Go: go for it, Baladi: Arabic for authentic, natural and unprocessed) stands for the pure, healthy and local nature of our product."



Hajjar Foods needed the help of a dairy expert to produce efficiently goat cheese with a texture and flavour comparable with the French goat cheese types. Hajjar first approached the USAID LED programme; LED: Lebanon Enterprise Development, supporting the SME sector in the Lebanon. They suggested that for a cheese expert it would be better to approach PUM. An online application was submitted and Hajjar Foods was contacted by the PUM representative in Lebanon, Marwan Nasr, to submit a final project proposal.

CAP ON TOP OF HEADSCARF

Dairy expert Aart van Boven was pleasantly surprised by what he found in Kab-Elias. Hajjar Foods is ISO 22000:2005-certified (ISO: international, standard food safety requirements for an organisation in the food supply chain), indicating that production is perfectly organized. Everything looks fine, including clothing, hairnets, gloves and even a cap on top of the headscarf. The building itself is relatively new, too.

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In this environment, van Boven supervised the entire production process and various cheese-producing cultures were tested. Two have now been selected which provide the best flavour. He set the ideal temperatures and advised on drainage techniques and cheese moulds.

"Further added value to our products can be obtained by sharing information with goat farmers in the mountains, who are very poor and have little knowledge about dairy production," suggested Andre Hajjar. "Together with three leading Lebanese specialists in this field, we can explain to them the off-season breeding. In this way we can introduce breeding techniques to local farmers that are applied in countries like the Netherlands and France. The farmers also receive information about smarter milking techniques and ways to improve the milk quality and goat feeding itself. The plan is to supply farmers with milking systems, milking installations and refrigeration equipment, in order to store milk longer with maintaining the quality. The result will be more milk for us and more income for the farmers."

With company director Joëlle Hajjar (Aart, "She does very much herself and works seven days a week!") and the laboratory assistant experiments to develop different blocks of goat cheese were started using bacteria cultures and rennet that van Boven had brought from the Netherlands.

When he departed from Lebanon, van Boven left behind a protocol on goat cheese production together with advice on purchasing the necessary equipment like a temperature-controlled cheese vat, cutting machines and cheese moulds. Since his visit, van Boven and Hajjar have regularly contact by email and WhatsApp. Hajjar has of course many questions and van Boven tries to help to find an answer to these questions.

A major problem is the irregular supply of goat's milk. As Aart explained: "For 1 kg of goat cheese between six and seven litres of milk are required. Goat's milk delivery is also seasonal; in spring and summer (the lambing period), Hajjar Foods receives around 1800 litres a day; in the winter just 400 litres a day". The quality of the milk was also not ideal because the farmers delivered their product uncooled. To ensure a more regular supply, Hajjar Food is now working with the farmers on an off-season breeding programme (breeding outside the normal breeding period). As Hajjar explained, "We put this into practice for the first time this year. Normally goats are fertilised in September and October, and give birth in February and March, at which point they start producing milk. Now the fertilisation process is carried out in April and May (by using, techniques widely used in Europe), so new-borns appear in October and November". Hajjar continued, "The experiment has been an 80 percent success, resulting in around five hundred newborn goat calves in just a small-scale trial with a herd of 500 goats".

In the near future, André Hajjar hopes to double the growth rate of Hajjar Foods S.A.L. This will also lead to more employment opportunities. "Next year we aim to be able to take on between five and seven new employees, and in 2020 the same number again. And if we achieve the quality and flavour we are looking for, I believe we can acquire a 20 percent market share."



Aart van Boven (66) is a microbiologist. He was employed at the Dutch dairy company Frico-Domo and also at a Dutch manufacturer of ingredients for cheese making (CSK, Coöperatieve Stremsel- en Kleursel-fabriek) as manager R&D and Quality Assurance. After Algeria, Armenia and Pakistan, Lebanon was his fourth mission for PUM. "To ensure a good standard of living in emerging countries, it is essential to share knowledge of the production of foodstuffs with local businesses. The enthusiasm of the project applicant guarantees high motivation and gives a great satisfaction in assisting the development of an attractive product."



Andre Hajjar (34) is Business Development Manager and co-founder of Hajjar Foods S.A.L. in Lebanon. "Aart and I plan to stay in touch. I can ask him questions about the cultures and necessary equipment. He has been a huge help with his knowledge and experience. We definitely have a long-term relationship. Extremely valuable!"

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P.O. Box 93078
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

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CONTACT

Bezuidenhoutseweg 12
2594 AV The Hague
The Netherlands
T +31(0)70 349 05 55
F +31(0)70 349 05 90
info@pum.nl

PUM APP

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